

Listen

A Seeker's Resource for Spiritual Direction

J U L Y 2 0 1 3

V O L 7 : I S S U E 3

UNLEASH, LET GO

The first half of our life is a journey spent acquiring, and holding on. We long for security, safety, assurances he or she will be faithful, our life will be steady, our purpose fulfilled. In my twenties, when I first intentionally engaged a focused spiritual practice, I learned terms such as detachment, egoless, and selfless. I thought—mistakenly—I had to let go of my desires, and die to self. For many women, and someone like me, this appeared to be a natural antidote to tame my wild courageous soul. I needed to become submissive to God, and believed I must be obedient to the letter of the law. In part, this was a response to being rebellious during my teen years. I wish someone had carefully shared with me that my passionate response to life is my wholeness—when directed toward goodness and justice.

A decade or more later, I was receiving cranial-sacral treatments for chronic neck pain. I worked diligently to *release* tension, negative thoughts, sadness over broken dreams, unhealthy patterns, pockets of ache and energy locked in my body. One day the healer mentioned that the word *release* implies energetically that a “re” lease will take place at a future time. She offered that the better idea would be to use two words: *let go*. In that aha-moment, I realized how often we use the word *release* when we really intend to *let go*. Pause for a minute to reflect.



Indian Peafowl — *Pavo cristatus*

Which word comes to mind in your vocabulary? Do you recognize the subtle difference?

A deep paradox exists: in order to *let go*, we must have a vision and maturing, grounded Self to hold onto that is more true, and more present than that which we let go of. In our lifetime, as we age, letting go is a wave we ride. We let go of relationships, patterns of behavior, thoughts and actions, dreams, our children, loved ones, health, and sometimes cherished ideals which have become false idols. Some are of our own choice in the fullness of time, many are circumstantial and done to us. When we can *let go*, we give permission for motion, pivot, and movement. This is a gift.

I wish I could explain how painful and simultaneously liberating it can be to *let go*. I wish I could explain how letting go is a moving through—a death and

new life. I can offer a meaningful poem I return to time and again. The Persian poet Jalaluddin Rumi offers permission to be met and accompanied.

Beyond our ideas of right-doing and wrong-doing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that
grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase
“each other”
doesn't make sense any more.

Whether the one who greets us is the Divine lover in our inner heart, a soul-friend, a four-legged, or the exquisite suchness of nature, we find our best self in a field such as this. It is in these times and places that we connect with our emerging future, a desire to savor life, the courage to let go, and move through. 🌿

—Pegge Erkeneff

SEEDS OF INTEREST:

- 🌱 Field Guide: *Emerging Perspective*
- 🌱 Poem: *Not this, not that*
- 🌱 Book Review: *Awake My Soul. A Contemplative Art Journal*
- 🌱 Global Resources
- 🌱 Poem: *The Quivering*
- 🌱 Ask Owl

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FIELD GUIDE

EMERGING PERSPECTIVE

Do you believe your life experiences can offer insight and that it can be valuable to deliberately look to your past, while visioning the future, and simultaneously be present in the now of life? Whether we are living in a time of letting go, being stuck, holding on, or flow, we can concurrently experience deep discernment or denial, consolation or desolation. At times like these, Richard Rohr, OFM, offers wisdom, "Every viewpoint is a view from a point, and we need to critique our own perspective if we are able to see and follow the full truth."

A perennial question to explore in spiritual direction or your own spiritual practice when pondering an experience, dream, insight, disconnect, longing, excitement, passion for justice, or confusion in the not-yet-knowing is to inquire, "Is there anything familiar about this feeling or thought in my life storyline?"

INVITATION

Be conscious of your breath, become present in the here and now ...

Pause, and without critiquing, allow your attention to travel your lifeline ...

Simply notice what you notice ...

Is there something familiar or that resonates with your current experience or thought? ...

Where in your body do you feel this sensation? ... Is it familiar? How? ...

... pay attention, notice, be still. Perhaps write down what is made known to you.

Go deeper: What was happening in your life at that time? Did you have a spiritual practice or connection with God, the Sacred, a community, mentor, teacher, or Was an invitation emerging? Where did it lead?



FURTHER PERSPECTIVE

Create a timeline of your life beginning with birth to your current age. Draw a line, a spiral, connecting circles—whatever intrigues you.

Add key events that relate to the question you want to explore. Write simple titles, words, an image or symbol to capture the awareness. Idea prompts to explore in your timeline:

- Peak experiences of God, Spirit, the Sacred, community, times of connection
- Encounters of ache for the world, injustice, or desire to serve others
- Moments of disconnect and alienation from myself and others
- Areas and places of connection and satisfaction with daily work
- Significant times of grief, loss, or illness
- Unexpected opening or closing of doors to possibility or threshold in-between times
- Joyful, playful celebrations
- Meaningful relationships
- Transformative books, music, retreats, people, landscapes

Be creative. Turn off the censor. Then, be mindful and sit with what emerges in order to determine what is being made known. Give thanks for possibility and the freedom to explore meaning, significance and emerging wisdom, from your lived experience.

Meet with a spiritual guide to share your insights and viewpoints. 🕊

Listen

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Not this, not that

I watch her raise her hands to heaven,
 “God, we know you’re strong, so stop!”
 as if God caused the earth to crack,
 shake open like a pack of cards to prove
 and punish those who doubt.
 But whose god is this anyway, and for
 that matter, who is mine? I used to know,
 or thought I did. Not anymore. Not this,
 not that. A shifting shape, a wordless space,
 an opening between bare trees.

— Sarah Rossiter [Massachusetts, USA]

“When I *let go*, I am
 simultaneously holding
 onto myself, and giving
 permission for life to flow.”

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 Registration at www.sdiworld.org

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BOOK REVIEW

Awake My Soul. A Contemplative Art Journal
by Aletheia Schmidt

Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2013

173 pages, GBPE16.09, USD\$25.99

Reviewed by Cheryl Lehman

"Play. Pray. Process. Paint." This contemplative art journal contains very few words but its interactional and engaging qualities invite the reader to ponder and notice what is evoked within.

Whether it is for a few quiet moments, or hours, when the questions and the art on each page are explored, shy inner stirrings are brought to consciousness. The imagination is aroused. Resistances unlock.

This art journal quite literally "awakens the soul" by the vivid colors, lines, circles, swirls, brush strokes, and solid swatches of color. Each page invites prayerful reflection with a question such as, "Are you more attracted to the closed door or to the light shining in this painting? Why?" (99). A bold painting with a simple "yes." painted near the center invites attention. A question is posed: "As the word 'yes' begins to nestle its way into your heart, what do you notice?" (39).

Encouragement comes to the user of this journal as the pages are turned. One page offers a beautiful image with the simple words "you lead me perfectly" in imperfect white painted letters near the top of the image (45).

Occasionally a blank page whimsically allures the user to create her or his own image. The opposite page has an image entitled "outside the box" (93). Every page opens the possibility for surprise and a new level of awareness.

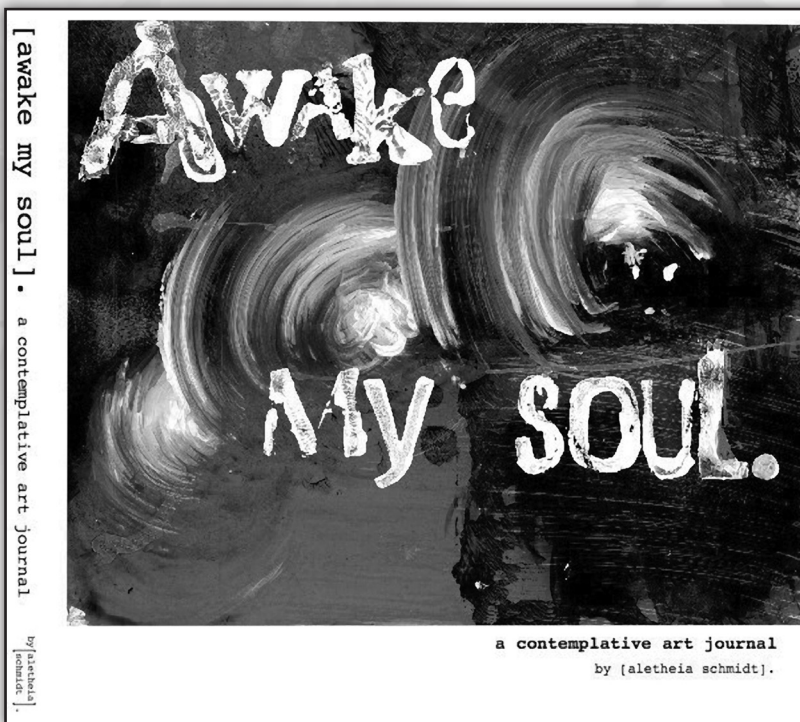
The appendix is not to be missed. Here Schmidt includes commentary and reflections on her paintings. Each one gives a hint of the author's significant transformation and her deepening spiritual inquiry. Spiritual directors will find this book a resource for seekers who desire to engage more right brain function, who may be finding

familiar ways of prayer drying up, who hope to explore the intersection between art and prayer, art and transformation, art, creativity, and prayer, and who long for expressions of desire. It will guide those who are willing to pray the questions with visual art forms, and for those who value freedom of expression and are open to the mysterious workings of Spirit.

This journal provides a unique resource for a youth group, a spiritual formation

group, any group of seekers and spiritual explorers, along with being a gem for use in your own spiritual practice or on retreat.

—Cheryl Lehman is a spiritual director and on the teaching faculty for the Kairos School of Spiritual Formation, Spiritual Direction Training Program, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA. She lives a contemplative life in Mount Joy, Pennsylvania, enjoys and thrives in the natural world, silent retreats, and tandem bike rides with her husband. E-mail her at thelehman@aol.com.

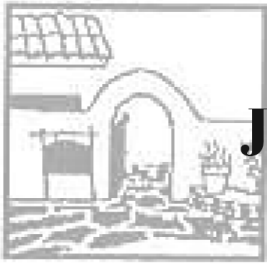


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Listen is an outreach publication of Spiritual Directors International. When you visit the SDI website at www.sdiworld.org, you can learn about retreats, programs, conferences, and other educational events related to spiritual companionship. You can read descriptions of the spiritual direction relationship from a variety of spiritual traditions,

and discover excellent questions to ask yourself and any potential spiritual directors you choose to interview. To locate a spiritual director or guide, go online to *Seek and Find Guide: A Worldwide Resource of Available Spiritual Directors*. More than 5,000 spiritual directors are listed by geographical location at www.sdiworld.org.





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The Quivering

She told me the story of her initiation—
 the choosing early on,
 the honoring of her inner sight by the Gathering.

Then for five years the people prepared
 her garments and her tools.
 The careful sewing of the robes,
 the mukluks, the headdress, and the gloves—
 with hide and fur and bead and quill.
 The five years of fashioning the rattles,
 the bags, the drum.

The night came long last,
 and she was dressed
 and adorned.
 In long ceremony of chant,
 dance, fire and prayer,
 she was made Shaman by the People.

Then,
 her mother took behind the tent,
 stripped her of everything
 and burned them in front of her eyes.
 “Cling to nothing,” her mother said.

The new shaman stood there by the fire,
 Shaken, quivering like a tender leaf,
 just emerged from bud—newly green,
 opening to the unknown.
 I, hearing the story, standing beside her,
 Quivering too.

— Marcia Wakeland [Alaska, USA]

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ASK OWL

Question: I trust my spiritual guide, yet I am fearful of being too vulnerable, and parts of my story are too private to share. How can I open myself to trust more deeply? I want to be open and transparent. I seek authentic life.

Hoot Hoot: In your asking, you are seeking, and revealing your deep desire for connection with all strands of your sacred story—your lived experience. For many of us, trusting another person can take months or years, even decades. During spiritual direction, our story is gradually revealed over time, and expressed through conversation, tears, dreams, art, writing, longings, memories, desire, body pains, passion, and an emerging future. Sometimes we share the same stories time and again, in repetition, as we seek to integrate and understand. A spiritual director holds the space—with the Spirit that some people name as God—and provides time and compassionate listening so we are able to listen to our own delight and angst. At other times, we experience our life as if on a movie



screen, in slow motion. A spiritual guide provides the resonance and spaciousness so we can hear our own story, receiving the beauty of who we are and the relationships the Spirit is inviting us to embrace.

A spiritual guide is not a judge. A spiritual guide is a companion, a man or woman who sees our potential, and holds a gaze of shelter and belonging. At times

it is a fierce gaze, in other moments, we see tenderness, compassion, humility. Our story is valuable, and speaking our truth gives voice to angst and ability. Please risk trusting your spiritual director, trust your own gut and intuition, and remember, we only move as swiftly as the slowest part of ourselves. Thus, whether it takes months or years to fully share and integrate our story, life invitations and experience, all is well in the fullness of time. Transparency, risk, and seeking create your authenticity.

—If you have a question for Owl, please e-mail Listen@sdiworld.org.



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“Tending the holy around the world and across traditions ...

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—Translated by Marta Rios and Xavier Ortiz Monasterio

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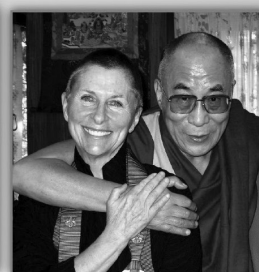
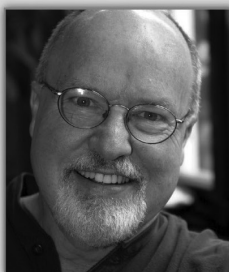
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